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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
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Op-553C/mgt
Ser 003P553C
31 JUL 1957

SECRET

SECRET - AQUATONE

From: Chief of Naval Operations
To: Director, Central Intelligence Agency

Subj: Project AQUATONE

1. The AQUATONE Project in which the Navy, until recently, has participated on a limited basis only, has produced in a relatively short time military intelligence and engineering advancements which can foreseeably place the military services in a particularly advantageous position. Individual systems, components and intelligence produced by this project are rapidly being evaluated and tested for operational use and are expected to be in use in the fleet during the present fiscal year.

2. During the recent months in which the Navy was accorded access to the operational aspects of this project it has become increasingly evident to the participants that certain unique capabilities of the Navy could be utilized to provide new, flexible, secure bases of operation. Preliminary discussions of this matter were conducted with representatives of CNO and BUAER. During these discussions the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) indicated that it would be favorably inclined toward participation in a carrier based detachment operation. It was proposed by CIA that four (4) to six (6) U-2 aircraft would be required to establish a carrier capability. On 17 April the Agency stated that the engineering of carrier suitable U-2 aircraft would be undertaken immediately. The Navy agreed to undertake an evaluation of the feasibility of the program and enthusiastically agreed to the worth and desirability of such a program.

3. It has been determined that there are many points and areas within the borders of the Sino-Soviet Bloc which are of vital intelligence interest to the Navy. It is not within the capabilities of present naval overt and covert collection methods to conduct satisfactory surveillance of these areas. The only means by which this vital intelligence collection may be accomplished is through covert aerial reconnaissance. Therefore the Navy desires to participate operationally in this program and to have at its disposal aircraft embodying the capability of reconnaissance throughout the photographic and electronic spectrum.

4. A comprehensive evaluation of the feasibility of supporting an AQUATONE detachment has been conducted. The implementation can be accomplished and would be in the best interests of the U. S. Government. Personnel and logistics support, shore and carrier based facilities can be made available.

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[REDACTED] As discussed previously the agency will provide the organizational facilities and the systems support which is now associated with the project. Upon termination of carrier operations the aircraft and associated systems would be retained by the Navy to permit their exploitation in research and development and operational programs.

5. It is anticipated that the operational advantages which the project currently enjoys will be lost in the technological developments of the next two (2) years. It is considered essential that the organization, training and ultimate deployment of a carrier based unit be initiated at the earliest practical date. It is requested that the proposed program be reconfirmed and that the dates upon which aircraft will be available be established. The facilities of this office and those of the Bureau of Aeronautics are available to assist in the immediate implementation of this program.

Arleigh Burke
ARLEIGH BURKE

Copy to:
Mr. Bissell, Project Director

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